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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [KNNP](#) [MNUC](#) [ETTC](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: DEEPENING COOPERATION THROUGH COUNTER-PROLIFERATION TASK
FORCE (CTF) WITH UAE

REFS: A) ABU DHABI 126, B) 08 ABU DHABI 1382, C) 08 ABU DHABI 940,
D) 08 ABU DHABI 727, E) 08 ABU DHABI 325, F) 08 ABU DHABI 323

Classified by Ambassador Richard Olson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) The bilateral Counter-proliferation Task Force (CTF) meeting on March 19 in Abu Dhabi is our opportunity to reinforce practical steps to strengthen the UAE's counter-proliferation (CP) regime and follow up on the prior CTF held February 25, 2008 (ref E).

The UAE's record on export control remains positive but there is room for improvement; we must give credit where credit is due while tactfully noting gaps that need urgent attention. (The goal is not to identify gaps so much as to motivate solutions to fill those gaps.) The U.S. read-ahead papers being prepared should be helpful in that regard.

Iran in the cross hairs -- but need a clean shot

¶2. (S/NF) The UAE is very wary of Iran's nuclear ambitions and spends a great deal of its defense resources to combat the threat of missiles that can easily reach its shores. An Iranian missile with a WMD payload would be a worst-case scenario. At the same time, the UAE (particularly Dubai) has a robust trading relationship with Iran that benefits the Emirates economically and in terms of keeping relations cordial with a much larger nation and potential military foe across the narrow Gulf. (Note: The UAE is the third largest exporter to Iran after China and Germany, and the largest in terms of re-exports. End note.) The UAE literally finds security in keeping trade relations active. Sifting through the contents of that robust (and important) traffic to weed out troublesome cargo is a formidable challenge.

¶3. (S/NF) Against that backdrop, the UAE is a reliable partner in enforcing UN Security Council Resolutions on Iran when the parameters of the case are clear. We have requested the seizure of multiple shipments -- politically and economically difficult for the UAE -- and found them a very cooperative partner. That said, we rarely find the UAE looking for ways to proactively identify suspect cargo on its own. In essence, the UAEG assists in carrying out the letter of the law on UNSCRs but does not take an aggressive unilateral approach to the spirit of the law.

Motivating a more proactive posture

¶4. (S/NF) This gap derives from both political and capacity limitations.

-- Fundamentally, the UAE worries that the US (and "the West" at large) will one day reach an accommodation with Iran, at which point Iran will be free to exact revenge on its little neighbor for having provoked it during a time when Iran was unpopular.

-- While Iran's increasingly belligerent posture in the region (and particularly in the wake of Gaza turmoil) makes the UAE ever more wary of Iran's intentions, the UAEG must nonetheless avoid provocations since it is a tiny country in comparison to Iran.

-- A certain degree of political hesitation stems from the importance of Iran trade, as well as a differential in how Abu Dhabi and Dubai view the problem (Abu Dhabi looks after national security while Dubai plays a more economic role).
-- The economic downturn puts a premium on keeping trade flowing.
-- The UAE is a small country (900,000 citizens) doing business as a much larger state with outsized economic ambitions and high transshipment volumes; marshalling the personnel resources to effectively sift through the complex shipping trade is simply daunting.
-- Even at the more mundane level of staffing the CP effort in key ministries, the recent departure of our sole CP interlocutor at MFA (Yacub al-Hosani) degrades MFA's ability to devote sufficient time and intellectual energy into more thoughtful coordination. (We should note these shortfalls cautiously without preaching; alas, the UAE Ambassador to the U.S. has pointed out that the U.S. team is also awaiting confirmations of new leaders.)
-- Judicial training has also been hampered by competing priorities as an ambitious UAEG imposes many top-down demands on the Ministry of Justice.
-- The UAE also hesitates when intelligence is not clear and convincing (the Iraq experience diminished the credibility of USG intelligence on WMD and the UAEG had few resources to build its own source network earlier in the game); as our seizure requests have validated the quality of our intelligence, the UAEG has become more comfortable.

The bottom line for the UAE is that provoking a big and fanatical neighbor is a risky proposition, and it needs every scrap of multilateral cover available for its actions.

15. (S/NF) These capacity and political constraints partly explain why the UAEG would like us to stop cargo at prior ports of call and we should frequently remind the UAE why we rely on it: 1) geography puts it in center court, 2) the UAE's robust economic role means huge trade volumes -- and consequent obligations, 3) CP is more in the UAE's interest than more distant states not easily threatened by Iran, and 4) intelligence takes time to develop and is more precise when a ship approaches the final port of call. Reminding the UAE that it is a likely target can create a firm resolve.

Opaque legal culture

16. (C/NF) The Export Control Law passed in August 2007 continues to guide UAE efforts, but remains in a state of revision. Information in early December (ref B) was that implementing authority for the law would be assigned to the same inter-agency committee that oversees Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) obligations, coordinated by the Ministry of Interior (MoI). With the amendment not yet published in the Official Gazette and absent clear confirmation of MoI's role, however, we hear that a new iteration may assign implementing authority to another body. We will want to confirm the status of the law further in CTF discussions (always wary of UAEG comments that the law is not as important as practical CP steps, which they often say should be our primary focus).

17. (S/NF) Late February press reports note the acquittal of persons accused of transporting Zirconium -- likely referring to the first case prosecuted under the Export Control Law (refs D and F). We must continue to stress that laws and law enforcement are critical to long term success, implementing bodies must be clear and active, ongoing judicial training is vital to ensure enforcement, awareness among private sector companies is a necessary force multiplier, and a record of strict penalties would make the law a key contributor to UAE security in a dangerous neighborhood. Emphasizing UAE interests over those of the U.S. or the UN help make the case for UAEG action. Positing the UAE as the potential victim of Iran's intentions can also reinforce caution on dual use items; Iran should not get the benefit of the doubt when military usage is possible/probable.

Helping spread the message

18. (C/NF) UAEG officials frequently comment that USG endorsements of UAE actions have been positive and that it is the Administration's duty to so inform the Congress. We need to delicately remind senior CTF members what while our sensitive coordination -- which they have

asked us to keep out of the public eye -- indeed has many successes which we report through proper channels, measures monitored directly by the Congress (like the Export Control Law) are also critical to getting the word out that the UAE is serious. The UAE needs to help with its own PR.

¶9. (C/NF) The connection which some in the U.S. draw between peaceful nuclear cooperation and the UAE export control record makes it all the more important that the UAE CP regime be robust not only at the highly classified levels but also in the public eye. Establishing clear enforcement mechanisms for the law, briefing industry on the law, and pursuing cases under the law would help provide that awareness.

The CP smorgasbord -- training

¶10. (C) Training opportunities outlined in the read-ahead paper offer a good menu from which we need to encourage the UAEG to partake. In addition to those opportunities, the UAEG has agreed to host in-port portions of the PSI exercise LEADING EDGE later this year. Leveraging that exercise to address critical questions like disposition of seized cargo (including legal ramifications), cautious scrutiny of dual-use goods, and broader inter-agency (and international) coordination should help advance UAEG capacity in the CP field. These are delicate questions best addressed in the context of practical exercises and case studies.

¶11. (S/NF) The CTF agenda can guide useful discussion if we approach it carefully. We must be cautious not to preach to an audience that on its terms is operating near full capacity, nonetheless clear on our views as to how the UAEG can (and must) do more. We should offer institutional answers to the questions we pose (legal avenues for cargo disposition [ref C], clear rationale for inspecting over-flights [if raised], simplified processes for providing training) while also pointing out staffing gaps that hinder the UAE effort institutionally. We must balance overload (a buffet with so many items that the UAEG simply cannot digest the offerings) against the need to ensure thoughtful mention of items that will require follow-up throughout the year.

OLSON